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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 002490

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/01/2010

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SUBJECT: REPORTED BDR/RAB CLASH WITH INDIAN INSURGENTS

Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, reason para 1.4 d.

11. (SBU) On May 27, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) personnel killed six Indian insurgents in a gunfight in Kamalganj, five kilometers from the border with Tripura state, according to local press reports. Bangladeshi security forces also reportedly launched a drive in the border areas of Jhenaigati in Sherpur district to root out Indian rebel hideouts on Bangladeshi territory. BDG officials, however, were quoted as saying the crackdown was on gunrunners. An unnamed BDR source speculated there might be links between the insurgents and recent grenade attacks in Bangladesh, but denied insurgents have any permanent base in Bangladesh.

12. (C) A respected Bangladeshi journalist told us that a Directorate General Forces Intelligence (DGFI) official informed him that the encounter followed a GOI ultimatum to the BDG to act by May 31 against Indian insurgents using Bangladeshi territory and that DGFI warned some insurgent groups beforehand of the action. A human rights activist with periodic contact with ULFA activists told us that one of the latter denied to him that the dead insurgents belonged to ULFA but were from another small group. RAB, the activist reportedly said, seized 10 million taka (about USD 159,00) from the insurgents' hideout. (Note: He was unclear whether the recovered currency was taka or something else). The activist blamed Home Minister of State Babar personally for orchestrating the attack, and indicated that if BDG security forces continue their offensive, insurgents might be forced to retaliate against Bangladeshi targets.

13. (C) We are attempting to verify through our own sources the reported Bangladeshi offensive against Indian insurgents. Queried on May 31, the Indian High Commission shared no substantive information.

14. (C) Comment: This is the first time in recent memory that the BDG has acted against or indirectly acknowledged the presence of Indian insurgents using Bangladeshi territory. It is trying to walk a fine line by apparently backgrounding the press that there was a concerted assault on Indian insurgents while publicly officials maintain the encounter was against "miscreants" and "gunrunners." It is unclear why the BDG would have changed tack and potentially set a precedent for attacking insurgents, though some speculate the BDG wants to bolster Indo-Bangladeshi atmospherics before the Foreign Secretary talks begin June 20.

CHAMMAS